

TIGER FLASHBACK

BUFORD

1999

In the final game of the 1999 regular season, the Buford Wolves rolled up I-85 into Commerce with a perfect (9-0-0) record and hoping to avenge two straight losses to the Tigers the latest a (55-33) thrashing in Buford in '98.

However, the Tigers also sported an unblemished (9-0-0) record in this Region 8A championship showdown before a packed house in Tigertown.

It's not unusual to hear football games compared to heavyweight fights, and this night's slugfest between the #1 ranked Tigers and the #4 ranked Wolves gave everyone their moneys worth.

Both teams connected with several short jabs and hooks. But every time one team would score the other would answer with their own tally, as the contest went back and forth. Each team made a run with neither team able to post consecutive scores. In the end it was the Tigers that won, not by a knockout, but on points, 42-32.

"It was all right," said Coach Steve Savage with a grin after the Tigers had gotten a first quarter lead that they never surrendered then went on to victory. He then added sarcastically, "There was a lot of defense in that game."

Defense was not a priority in this feature bout, as Commerce racked up 14 first downs and 346 yards all on the ground, while Buford knocked out 23 first downs with 257 rushing and 197 passing.

Commerce took the kickoff and opened the scoring with a five play, 66-yard drive culminated by quarterback Daniel Carder's option keeper over left guard. Carder then booted his first of six consecutive PAT's for an early Tiger lead at (7-0).

Buford countered the Tiger score with one of their own, as the wild hounds treked 79 yards in 12 plays climaxed by fullback Joey McDonald's one yard plunge. On the PAT the holder bobbled the snap and attempting to run was denied the score by the Tiger's swarming defense to leave the score at 7-6 in favor of the Tigers. This was the first of four unsuccessful PAT attempts in a row by the Wolves.

Commerce then gave a counterpunch of their own, as they bolted down the field 65 yards in seven plays with Monte' Williams picking up 51 yards in four totes. Carder again tallied for the Tigers on an eight-yard option keeper around left end with only 23

ticks left in the initial period. Carder's kick upped the Tiger lead to (14-6).

After a Carder interception of Buford quarterback Payne five plays later at the Commerce 37 and returning it eighteen yards to the Wolves 37, the Tigers gave it right back when Carder fumbled on the option with Buford gaining possession at the 29 from where another Buford TD march was initiated.

On the eleventh play thereafter, Payne hit split end Tony Williamson with a 35-yard touchdown strike. However, Carder stepped up again for the Tigers, as he sacked the Buford quarterback on the two-point pass conversion attempt leaving the score at (14-12) for Commerce.

On the first play following the kickoff, Monte' set sail on a 64-yard touchdown jaunt leaving many Buford defenders in his wake. With 4:03 remaining before the half, the Tigers now had bolted to a 21-12 advantage following Carder's successful boot.

Not to be denied, Payne led his charges back to another score in ten plays with running back Chris Sadler adding a score from one yard out. Again the Tigers' two-point conversion defense stepped up with Michael Collins sacking Payne this time to prevent a successful conversion pass leaving the score at halftime (21-18) in favor of the gold and black.

To begin the second half for Buford following the kickoff, fullback Alfonzo Stanley fumbled on the first play from scrimmage after a stinging hit by Tiger defender Chad Scoggins with Monte' Williams recovering and returning seven yards to the Buford 15 setting up the Tigers' with a golden opportunity to steal a Td this their fourth of the night, as they were about to place another hard right to Buford's chin.

Carder plunged over from two yards out four plays later for the score, and his successful PAT increased the Commerce lead to (28-18) in the early stages of the second half.

Behind all night, the Wolves got their second wind and came back with a determined drive to score in ten plays culminated by Sadler's one yard plunge into the Tiger defensive line. Tiger defender Michael Collins then collected his second two-point conversion sack of Payne to deny any more points with the Tiger lead remaining at a close (28-24) score.

As was the pattern of this slugfest all night, the Tigers answered the next round with a six play, 58-yard drive of their own which was highlighted by a fourth and five option keeper by QB Carder's, as he ran 36 yards around left end before being pushed out of bounds at the one.

He then ran the same play once more for his fourth touchdown of the evening and kicked the successful PAT to push the Tiger lead to (35-24). Commerce had busted Buford on the chin again, as the overflow crowd saw the two teams stand toe to toe in

this championship bout.

Following the kickoff, Payne brought the Wolves back down the field to pay dirt 80 yards in six plays highlighted by two passes to Hunter Cantwell of 15 and 37 yards to the four from which McDonald plunged into the end zone from the four for the TD. McDonald added the two-point conversion run and cut the Tiger margin to three points at (35-32) with only a few seconds remaining in the third quarter.

The Tiger offensive line consisting of ends--Collins and Lee Sorrow, tackles--Jonathan Martin and Josh Crawford, guards--Eric Moore and John Harrison and Center--Russ Brown. They continually blocked and dominated the Buford defense, as they repeatedly opened holes for Tiger backs.

Gaining possession once more at the end of the third period, the Savage Tiger I-Bone machine again bolted down the field to pay dirt behind Carder and Williams, with Monte' capping the ground attack on a 21-yard run around right end. Carder nailed another PAT to push the Tiger lead to (42-32). Williams ended his fabulous night with 262 rushing yards on 22 carries.

Buford had two more scoring opportunities. The first was stymied by the renewed Tiger defense, as the Wolves, facing fourth and two at the Commerce 15 came up just inches short on McDonald's plunge into the line.

Moments later, a short Michael Collins punt of only sixteen yards out to the Tiger 43 gave Buford its second scoring opportunity of the final stanza. In seven plays the Wolves burst down to the Tiger one yard line before procedure penalty moved them back to the six.

The Commerce defense then came off the ropes and denied the Wolves their sixth TD of the night when on third down Collins batted down a QB Payne pass in the end zone and on fourth down another pass fell incomplete due to the Tiger pass rush. The heavyweight spectacle then ended eighty four ticks later with players as well as fans exhausted on both sides. Wow, what a game.

On this night the two teams scored 11 touchdowns, a total of 74 points and racked up 800 yards of total offense. Whew!!!! What a track meet, what a heavyweight encounter between two superb teams in this classic Region 8A title game.

The Region 8A champion 1999 Tigers went on to post a (13-1-0) record before losing to Lincoln County in the Georgia Dome. They also defeated twelve other opponents in a row: Madison County, Franklin County, Jefferson, Towns County, Dawson County, GAC, Rabun County, Banks County, Union County, Armuchee, Athens Academy and Dooly County.

Others on the 1999 squad were: Wes Prickett, Charlie Epps, Josh Jordan, Adam

Bagwell, Sam Cutler, Kyle Moore, Saeed Beituni, Scott White, Clint Cook, Chris Wilkie, Greg Watts, Kenny Flint, Taylor Massey, DeShay Pittman, Justin David, Adam Stephenson, Evan Crawford, Adam Cochran, Tyson Brown, Dustin Martin, Rob Brown, Lamar Daniels, Brandon Jennings, Nicholas Cox, Twion Shealer and Casey Gary.

Partially compiled from *ATHENS DAILY NEWS* reports

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Commerce-Banks County Series

Record----- (21-2-0)

Home----- (11-0-0)

Away----- (10-2-0)

Shutouts

Commerce----- 7

Banks County----- 1

Record By Decade

70's----- (6-0-0)

80's----- (8-0-0)

90's----- (4-2-0)

2000's----- (3-0-0)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Commerce</u>	<u>Banks County</u>
1970	32	0
1971*	26	12
1972	40	7
1973*	35	6
1974	40	8
1975*	62	0
1982	35	8
1983	34	0
1984*	28	0
1985	34	0
1986*	35	0
1987	35	7
1988*	40	0

1989*	44	19
1990	24	29
1991*	40	11
1992	0	28
1993*	21	7
1998*	50	6
1999	49	6
2002	12	0
2003*	35	14
2004	40	13
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23 games	791	181
average	34.4	7.9

*-----Home Games